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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

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A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC Stations, Wednesday, March 28, 1934.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, Miss Van Deman, what's your Household Calendar topic today? More about the new fabrics for spring clothes?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, not fabrics this time, Mr. Salisbury. I was going to talk about the labels on rayon goods today, but I changed my mind. No use being a woman if you can't change your mind now and then. Some other day I'll give the facts about rayon dress goods, but today I'm going to talk about eggs.

What set me off, I think, was something I heard Mrs. Roosevelt say at her last press conference. One of the newspaper girls asked her whether Washington children will be invited to roll their Easter eggs on the White House lawn next Monday. She smiled and said, "Yes indeed, the egg rolling will be just as usual." And she might have added "Rain or shine!" For Washington youngsters count so much on this Easter egg rolling at the White House that a few April showers never keep them home. Next Monday noon you can picture them, literally by the thousand, going toward the White House carrying their bright-colored baskets filled with eggs dyed purple, and green, and red, and yellow, and every other imaginable color. The First Lady will be waiting on the South Portico to greet them, probably the Marine Band will be playing, and we certainly hope the sun will be shining. We can use a little spring sunshine down here in Washington. The buds on the cherry trees need it, as well as the children and the rest of us.

Now for a little of the scientific theory of cooking eggs. Every spring, the mail at the Bureau of Home Economics is full of questions as to why meringues fall, what makes custards watery, and how to cook eggs so the whites are soft and tender like jelly. Well, if I had to, I could almost answer those questions by a ten-word telegram. I'd put it like this: "Cook eggs slowly, use moderate temperature. Stop. Never overcook eggs". Really, in those ten words you have the main rules of all egg cookery, whether you're using the frying pan, or the oven, or the double boiler, or what not.

The reason of course is that eggs are chiefly protein. And when you apply heat to protein, it coagulates. If you use very intense heat, naturally you speed up the coagulation of the protein. But you also make it tough and hard. You can notice this especially in the white of the eggs. You know how it is when you slice up a hard-boiled egg. Notice I said Boiled, and I mean one that's been boiled and boiled. The yolk shrinks away from the white, and as you cut off the slices the center drops out and leaves white rings that remind you of nothing so much as creamy white rubber when you start to chew them. Exactly the same thing happens when you fry an egg over a very hot fire, or when you drop it into boiling water to poach and let the water keep right on boiling.

(over)

Egg white begins to coagulate at a temperature around 140° F., which is a long way below the boiling point of water. At sea level, you remember, water boils at 212° F. So if you want to cook eggs and keep the protein tender keep the heat down to a very moderate temperature.

If you're cooking eggs in the shell, have the water at the simmering point, around 185° F., instead of twenty-five degrees higher so that it boils. And if you're baking a meringue or a souffle or a fruit whip, hold the oven temperature down between 250° and 300° F. Then the film of egg white which surrounds the tiny bubbles of air will stretch to full capacity and then gradually set through and through and the mixture will stay light and fluffy after you take it out of the oven. Or if you are poaching eggs, drop them into boiling salted water, turn out the heat or pull the pan to the back of the stove, and put on a cover to hold in the steam. It's just the same principle -- ever time -- slow cooking at moderate temperature.

Here's an idea that came in to me in a letter from a man up in Pennsylvania who listens in on the Household Calendar now and then. When a man takes an interest in cooking I always sit up and take notice.

"Speaking of eggs," he writes, "I didn't hear you tell us how to dress up the lowly fried egg to look like a fifty-cent dish. For a long while I've been cooking mine so they suit me. Well, you just start out to fry them as usual and then when about half done, put a teaspoonful of water in the pan and put a lid on it. When done, you won't have a lot of rubbery white nor will you have a partially raw egg either, but instead the whole egg will be delicately white and the glassy-egg look will be gone. Try it some time and I think you'll like it." That's all from the letter.

Absolutely O.K., Mr. Pennsylvania. I've tried your method and it works. The teaspoon of water creates a little steam which helps to cook the egg on top, and gives an effect something like a cross between a fry and a poach. You're applying the very principle I've been talking about -- to cook the protein of the egg slowly but thoroughly.

Now on the custards that separate and turn watery. Oftentimes the trouble there is quite as much from over cooking, as from using too high a temperature. If you're making a soft custard be sure to cook it over steam in a double boiler, and cook it only until it coats a spoon. Then take it from the heat at once, and set it in a bowl of cold water to cool. If you're baking a custard, take it from the oven as soon as it is set. Test it with the point of a thin knife. If the knife blade comes out clean, the custard is baked enough.

If any of you would like some printed information on cooking eggs, write to me and I'll be glad to send you what we have.

Goodbye for this time, and a happy Easter to you.